



NEWS RELEASE

Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts

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Contact: Dick Carelli

Federal Judges Recommend Policy on Electronic Access to Court Files

A committee of United States judges today made public its [report](#) and recommendations for a nationwide policy governing electronic availability of federal court case file information.

The report was endorsed unanimously by the 14-judge Committee on Court Administration and Case Management of the Judicial Conference of the United States, and its release was directed by the Conference's seven-member Executive Committee.

The full 27-member Conference, which makes policy for the federal courts, is expected to consider the report and recommendations when it meets September 11.

The Committee on Court Administration and Case Management recommends:

- Documents in civil cases should be made available electronically to the same extent that they are available at the courthouse with one exception (Social Security cases should be excluded from electronic access) and one change in policy (that certain "personal data identifiers" should be modified or partially redacted by the litigants; these identifiers are Social Security numbers, dates of birth, financial account numbers and names of minor children).
- Public remote electronic access to documents in criminal cases should not be available at this time, with the understanding that this policy will be re-examined within two years of adoption by the Judicial Conference.
- Documents in bankruptcy case files should be made generally available electronically to the same extent that they are available at the courthouse, with a similar policy change for personal identifiers as in civil cases. Section 107(b)(2) of the Bankruptcy Code should be amended to establish privacy and security concerns as a basis for the sealing of a document; and the Bankruptcy Code and Rules should be amended as necessary to allow the court to collect a debtor's full Social Security number but display only the last four digits.
- Appellate case files should be treated at the appellate level the same way in which they are treated at the lower level.

Electronic access to court docket sheets through PACERNet and to court opinions through their respective web sites will not be affected by the proposed policy. Neither will the availability of case files at the courthouse. A copy of the committee's report can be located at http://www.uscourts.gov/Press_Releases/att81501.pdf

(MORE)

The Judicial Conference of the United States is the principal policy-making body for the federal court system. The chief justice serves as the presiding officer of the Conference, which is composed of the chief judges of the 13 courts of appeals, a district judge from each of the 12 geographic circuits, and the chief judge of the Court of International Trade. The Conference meets twice a year to consider administrative and policy issues affecting the court system and to make recommendations to Congress concerning legislation involving the Judicial Branch.

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